

## BUSINESS, CONSUMER SERVICES, AND HOUSING AGENCY

1010 Hurley Way, Suite 300  
Sacramento, CA 95825  
(916) 263-6000  
Fax (916) 263-6042

[www.chrb.ca.gov](http://www.chrb.ca.gov)

## CALIFORNIA HORSE RACING BOARD



Los Alamitos Race Course  
4961 E. Katella Avenue  
Los Alamitos, CA 90720

Contact: Mike Marten  
(714) 240-1870  
[MikeM@chrb.ca.gov](mailto:MikeM@chrb.ca.gov)

CHRB NEWS RELEASE

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## CHRB RESPONSE CONCERNING VMB ACTION

The California Horse Racing Board (CHRB) respects the mission of the California Veterinary Medical Board (VMB) to enforce the professional standards of its practice and passionately shares its commitment to animal safety. CHRB is equally respectful of the role of due process, which provides all California licensees the opportunity to be heard and defend their livelihood when accusations are brought against their license. In response to the actions brought by the VMB against Dr. Blea, Equine Medical Director (EMD), the CHRB respectfully disagrees with its pursuit of an emergency interim suspension order of his license, alleging he is an imminent danger to the public, citing specifically his role in the Medina Spirit investigation.

However, given the sensitive and very public nature of the necropsy and resulting investigation into the death of Medina Spirit, and in keeping with the CHRB's commitment to integrity and transparency, the CHRB has asked the Executive Associate Dean of UC Davis' School of Veterinary Medicine to oversee the necropsy and forensic examination of Medina Spirit. The CHRB believes this also satisfies the VMB's stated reason for filing the temporary suspension petition and therefore requires it to consider its withdrawal.

The CHRB is capable and specifically vested with the regulatory authority to ensure that all investigations, including necropsy reviews, are performed accurately and with the utmost diligence and transparency. This is a responsibility of the CHRB, not the VMB, and its emergency actions are unnecessary and outside the scope of its authority. This point was confirmed in the emergency petition decision stating, "There was, however, no evidence presented at hearing that would suggest that the Board (VMB) has the authority to invalidate Respondent's appointment or otherwise interfere with his duties as the Equine Medical Director." That its emergency actions nevertheless seek to exclude Dr. Blea from contributing as the EMD to the critical and valuable work done through the necropsy program is unfortunate, and an improper application of its oversight and regulatory authority.

"In my view, the allegations against Dr. Blea have yet to be proven, and as such, he should be able to serve as the EMD until the final outcome of the accusation filed against his license can be fully adjudicated through the administrative process," said CHRB Chairman Dr. Greg Ferraro, who previously served on the VMB. "At that point, the CHRB would be in a better position to

determine any appropriate actions to take considering the final outcome and its full context in application and relationship to Dr. Blea's role as EMD."

CHRB Executive Director Scott Chaney added, "Dr. Blea has done excellent work for the CHRB since he began his employment at UC Davis on July 1 and accepted the position of EMD. My concern is that not relying on his expertise, advice, and work in the role of EMD would diminish the CHRB's ability to effectively promote animal welfare and, in a very real way, make horses less safe in California. Of course, the full Board has the ultimate authority to determine its course of action, and the next opportunity for the Board to discuss the matter will be in closed session on January 20 following the regularly scheduled Board meeting."

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